

## **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN LANGUAGE TEACHING**

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**Annotation:** The goal of an experiential language learning approach is to provide learners with “concrete experiences through which they ‘discover’ language principles even if subconsciously by trial and error, by processing feedback, by building hypotheses about language, and by revising those assumptions in order to become fluent”

**Keywords:** experiential language, feedback, hypotheses.

Learning through experience is not a new concept for the college classroom. Notable educational psychologists such as have provided the groundwork of learning theories that focus on “learning through experience or “learning by doing.” Dewey popularized the concept of Experiential Education which focuses on problem solving and critical thinking rather than memorization and rote learning. Rogers considered experiential learning “significant” as compared to what he called “meaningless” cognitive learning. Kolb also noted that concrete learning experiences are critical to meaningful learning and is well known for his Learning Style Inventory which is widely used in many disciplines today to help identify preferred ways of learning. A key element of experiential learning, therefore, is the student, and that learning takes place (the knowledge gained) as a result of being personally involved in this pedagogical approach.

Unlike traditional classroom situations where students may compete with one another or remain uninvolved or unmotivated and where the instruction is highly structured, students in experiential learning situations cooperate and learn from one another in a more semi-structured approach. Instruction is designed to engage students in direct experiences which are tied to real world problems and situations in which the instructor facilitates rather than directs student progress. “The focus of EL is placed on the process of learning and not the product of learning”. Proponents of experiential learning assert that students will be more motivated to learn when they have a personal stake in the subject rather than being assigned to review a topic or read a textbook chapter. What is essential in EL, however, “that the phases of experiencing (doing), reflection and applying are present. In addition, “the stages of reflection and application are what make experiential

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learning different and more powerful than the models commonly referred to as ‘learn-by-doing’ or ‘hands-on-learning’”

Qualities of experiential learning are those in which students decide themselves to be personally involved in the learning experience (students are actively participating in their own learning and have a personal role in the direction of learning). Students are not completely left to teach themselves; however, the instructor assumes the role of guide and facilitates the learning process. The following list of student roles has been adapted from, students will be involved in problems which are practical, social and personal. Students will be allowed freedom in the classroom as long as they make headway in the learning process. Students often will need to be involved with difficult and challenging situations while discovering. Students will self-evaluate their own progression or success in the learning process which becomes the primary means of assessment.

Students will learn from the learning process and become open to change. This change includes less reliance on the instructor and more on fellow peers, the development of skills to investigate (research) and learn from an authentic experience, and the ability to objectively self-evaluate one’s performance.

In many English classes all over the world, students are engaged in the activities in which they are being exposed to language input and provided exercises to practice the language in variety of activities. These activities basically provide students with concrete experience to learning the target language. However, there are some principles of how to implement experiential learning in the English classroom. Firstly, Experiential learning in English language teaching is built on the principle that language learning is facilitated when students are cooperatively involved in working on a project or task. Secondly, the use of experiential learning in English language classroom requires the teacher to contextualize language that integrates the four skills and lead toward authentic, real world purposes. Experiential learning highlights a direct encounter with the subject matter or the topic being studied rather than simply reading and talking about it. It needs some physical involvement in the phenomena as well. Brown further stated that experiential learning tends to put an emphasis on the psychomotor aspects of language learning by involving students in physical actions in which language is subsumed and reinforced. Through action, students are drawn into a utilization of multiple skills. In the field of second-language acquisition (SLA), the

experiential approach encourages learners to develop the target language skills through the experience of working together on a specific task, rather than only examining discrete elements of the target language. With regard to the phase of reflection that follows such experience, students are then required to actively engage with their own past experiences and focus on the future. In addition to students' language development achieved through the experience of working together to practice the target language, experience learning implies many other potential benefits for SLA in terms of motivation, investment, and cultural understanding.

Students' experiences are valuable and meaningful for their language learning. Through project-based or task based, the experiential learning phases allow students to experience directly the use of real communication in a set up scene, to reflect their feelings and language learning experience, and to enable them to link and transfer their experience in the classroom into the real world. Furthermore, experiential learning offers some potential benefits not only for students' language development, but also for strengthening their independent learning, building motivation, and cultural understanding. Nevertheless, there are some shortcomings of the use of experiential learning in TEFL such as linguistic demand beyond students' level and the use of mother tongue during the project accomplishment. To overcome these obstacles, the teacher plays very central role to select a project that is relevant to their level and equip students with adequate lexical preparation.

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